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JEW S AND GERMANISM

BY
ABRAHAM WALLENSTEIN

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JEWS AND GERMANISM

WITH the break-up of the old Russian Empire and the detachment from Russia proper of Poland, the Baltic Provinces, and the Ukraine, many millions of Jews, perhaps one-half of the Jews of the world, will come, temporarily at any rate, under German rule or German influence, and it therefore becomes a matter of the greatest interest to consider what change has already taken place—for better or for worse—in the condition of those Jews transferred by the fortune of war from Russian to German control. The change unfortunately is most disconcerting. Even when liberal allowance is made for what may be regarded as the inevitable suffering caused to a civil population by enemy military occupation, a large body of reliable evidence is now available, largely from neutral sources, which establishes the fact that specially harsh treatment has been deliberately imposed upon the unfortunate Jews living in the territories conquered by Germany. Indeed, their misery in some parts of what was once Russian territory has reached a pitch in no measure less than any sufferings endured by the unhappy small peoples of Europe on whom has fallen the brunt of this devastating war.

Even bearing in mind what Jews suffered from restrictive legislation and active persecution under the Russian autocracy, seeing that Germany has more than once posed as the benign liberator of provinces which have long groaned under Russian oppression, one cannot fail to wonder whether the disease is not preferable to the cure, and one realises the more how truly tragical is the lot of the Jews, of whose fate changed conditions, whether by conquest or revolution, seem only to alter the manner.

As already stated, the ill-treatment of the Jews, more particularly in Poland and Lithuania, is no natural and necessary accompaniment of the operations of war; it is not even a case of mere folly on the part of particular officials or a particular State Department. It is a symptom of deliberate anti-Semitic policy, the object of which would appear to be either to secure the support of the existing anti-Semitic party which, at any rate in Poland, is an extremely large and powerful one, by diverting against the Jews the unpopularity that is resulting from the policy of brutal repression; or else to create as much antagonism as possible between the various races in the conquered provinces, and so consolidate the German position by applying the well-tried principle of "Divide and rule"; or, finally, the object of this policy of persecution may be merely to cause the Jews to emigrate and leave open the fields of industrial enterprise and development to traders of German origin.

But whatever the reason for it, we shall see that the nature of the treatment meted out to the Jews shows incontestably that it is part of a set policy, and this more than anything else aggravates the charge that has to be made against the German Government.

I

CONDITIONS IN POLAND

THE FOOD SITUATION.—According to the latest reports available (July, 1917), the amount of food allowed for distribution in the large towns in Poland is utterly inadequate to sustain life. In Warsaw the bread ration at the date mentioned was but 2 lbs. per head per week, and this was the only food assured to the people. Certainly in Warsaw other foodstuffs could be obtained, but only at prices absolutely prohibitive to all but the wealthy classes. Thus butter was nearly 7s. a lb., flour nearly 3s., and rice 4s. to 4s. 6d. a lb., and hence the poor had nothing beyond the small ration of bread. To be sure food is more plentiful in the country districts, but there is a prohibition against food being sent from these districts into the towns, attempts to evade which are severely punished; and seeing that it is in the large towns that the great communities of Jews are concentrated, it is on them that the shortage falls most heavily.

It must be borne in mind that there is no regulation of the distribution of foodstuffs in Poland. The bread-card system is in practice carried out to a small extent only, and the greater part of the population relies for its food on the "people's kitchens" and the so-called "kitchens for the educated classes." From a Report of a member of one of the Polish Relief Committees, it appears that in January, 1917, some 140,000 persons were supplied daily with food in the former of these institutions. The daily ration consisted of $1\frac{1}{4}$ pints of "soup," *i.e.*, boiled water, with turnips, some greens and potatoes (if such were to be had), as well as up to $3\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. of bread. The quality of the soup is stated to have steadily deteriorated, and to have been of exceedingly little nutritive value. It was a harrowing sight to see the thousands lined up in queues before the people's kitchens.

The conditions with regard to the feeding of children are

declared in the same Report to have been particularly wretched. A large number of children were receiving milk thinned with water, and those examined were in a terrible condition of under-feeding. As an example, a child of 18 months weighed under 8 lbs., and almost all children between the ages of 1½ and 7 years continuously lose in weight. One child of 1½ years, with a normal weight of 20 lbs., weighed, after a further 11 months, only 16 lbs., and even the children of six or seven years who were seen were unable to stand on their legs, because these were hardly 1 1-5th inch round, and the entire body was shrivelled and almost jelly-like. Many children who, a couple of years earlier, were still able to walk, were then quite unable to do so.

A neutral consul who has been through the occupied districts is reported to have stated, referring to conditions early in 1918, that the dogs in his own country were better supplied with food than were the Jews in the occupied provinces.

The refugees who have been able to escape to the United States corroborate these statements. A reporter in an American paper writes:—"All the immigrants had practically the same tale to tell. The streets are full of children with their stomachs swollen with hunger. All sorts of epidemics have spread throughout Poland and Lithuania. The sufferings of the unfortunates are indescribable. Men, women and children are rolling on the ground for pain. Their cries fill the air. They lie on the sidewalks and beg the passers-by to save them with a piece of bread. Old men and women who are hardly able to walk come to the barracks, fall at the soldiers' feet, and beg for a piece of bread or potato." . . .

HEALTH CONDITIONS AND DISEASE.—The consequence of the terrible underfeeding described above is that the susceptibility to disease is increased and the capacity of resistance is diminished, and as a result epidemics, typhus, and dysentery are raging terribly among the poorest families in the large towns of Poland. It is stated in the Report already referred

to that all tubercular cases since the outbreak of war have in the meantime died, and the pulmonary diseases that now occur are of an exceptionally severe character. Spotted fever was particularly rampant last summer, and all the hospitals were overcrowded.

In spite of the fact that the Jews, on account of the appalling unhygienic and insanitary conditions in the Jewish quarters, due to indescribable overcrowding, formed 90 per cent. of all the hospital cases, practically no Jewish nurses were employed in hospitals. The hygienic conditions in the hospitals visited by the author of the Report were found to be exceedingly bad, and the overcrowding was deplorable. The beds were filled with straw, and instead of bedding, patients, whether dying or convalescent, were found to be covered only with a black coverlet.

Even in the hospitals the food is insufficient; in the best hospital visited the food provided was only some two-thirds of the minimum necessary for the maintenance of a sick person. The action of the authorities is such as to increase rather than to check the spread of disease and the prevalence of epidemics. For example, typhoid is transmitted by lice, and energetic measures are taken by the German and Polish authorities to stamp out the breeding centres of infection. These measures involve the segregation of dwellers in infected districts in special institutions for nearly a whole day, during which no food is served out. A terrible state of disorder reigns in these institutions, and the expression of misery on the faces of the unfortunate people is said by an eye-witness to be unspeakable.

Furthermore, on account of the terrible overcrowding that obtains in towns like Warsaw, where two or three families frequently live in a cellar without flooring and without heat, if one individual falls ill the whole house, comprising perhaps a few hundred souls, is immediately threatened. As a consequence of this and of the police measures just referred to, epidemic diseases are not reported to the police, and often a

child that has died by an epidemic disease remains lying for days among the living, and in this way entire houses are infected.

A new disease with exceptionally terrible consequences is now arising. In consequence of continued hunger the fat of the bones is attacked, after the other fat of the body has disappeared. Even after subsequent plentiful nourishment the organism is unable to supply the bones with the fat consumed, and such a person remains an invalid for the remainder of his life. This fact has been emphasised by several independent observers, and it seems certain that after the war there will be an army of tens of thousands of incapacitated cripples, to be a burden to a community that has been economically ruined by the war.

MORTALITY.—The mortality is growing enormously. According to the statistics of the Jewish community in Warsaw, the death rate per 1,000 during the last four years in the month of April was as follows:—

				APRIL.			
				1914	1915	1916	1917
Death rate	12.6	22.5	24.4	41.6

The mortality is thus 230 per cent. greater than the normal rate, and, needless to say, it very greatly exceeds the present birth rate.

Dead or dying persons are found in almost every house, and not infrequently in the streets. There are hundreds and thousands of families which at the outbreak of the war had five or six children, of which now only two or three are left, and these for the most part are scarcely able to walk by themselves.

Generally it may be said that old people and children are gradually disappearing, and middle-aged people in consequence of under-feeding are becoming greatly weakened and subject to chronic diseases. A report received only last March still referred to the enormous number of deaths in Warsaw

and Lodz; in some cases the bodies could not even be buried for four or five days, and burials frequently take place the whole night.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.—Factories, owing to lack of raw materials and machinery, have had to stop work. Industry and trade having ceased, the workmen are perfectly destitute, and the modest means which the middle classes had at their disposal at the outbreak of war are now quite exhausted. People who previously were regarded as wealthy and possessed fortunes of some thousands of pounds, are now dependent upon small money doles. Others, ashamed to accept charitable help, have sold even the most necessary articles of clothing in order to feed themselves and their children. There are thousands of cases of people who before the war lived in five or six rooms but who now, being entirely ruined, have at last, after three years of racking torment, had to apply for assistance to the various relief organisations that have been constituted.

The moral misery involved is perhaps even more serious than the material, when men of independence and spirit have gradually to sink into the ranks of beggars. Of the Jewish population in Warsaw, comprising about 340,000 souls, there now live—if it can be called living—220,000 on scanty relief.

Of the total number of Jewish children between the ages of three and thirteen in Warsaw, namely, some 90,000, only about 21,000 are now finding accommodation in the communal schools and institutions. The remaining 70,000 run about the houses and beg, and become victims of the terrible influences of the street. The effect of this on the girls can be imagined. Jewish girls, in order to save their parents and little brothers and sisters from literally dying of hunger, loiter about the barracks and beg a morsel of bread from the soldiers, with the result that many whose modesty could serve as a pattern of Jewish morality, are now, through no fault of their own, sinking into the abyss.

There are innumerable cases where people who could earn something are unable to work, because they are clothed in in-

describable rags, and in the winter the children, bare-footed and naked, cannot even go to the children's homes and schools to get the small amount of relief there available.

The entire Jewish population of Poland is faced by a complete physical and spiritual decay.

The economic situation is greatly aggravated by the German system of requisitioning raw materials and of exacting forced labour, both of which instruments of oppression are being used with preferential harshness against the Jews. The German officials concerned with the requisition of raw materials have a very bad reputation, and the fact that they are living in luxury and comfort while the people on whom their exactions fall have become destitute, adds greatly to the hatred felt towards them. They may be men of blameless integrity, but goods are certainly seized either without payment or else for equivalents out of all proportion to their value.

Furthermore, the German administration is trying by all possible means artificially to reduce the value of the rouble, and officials often enter a café, search everyone present, and forcibly substitute marks for roubles at the official rate of exchange (Mk. 2.15). This treatment bears particularly heavily upon Jews, as commerce is practically in their hands, and they have no redress.

The system of forced labour will be dealt with when considering conditions in Lithuania, as it is now stated to have ceased in Warsaw.

That the Jews, over and above the rest of the population, are subjected to personal indignities and brutalities at the hands of the Germans may be stated almost as a matter of course. "Wherever one turns," writes one emigrant to America, "one is sure to hear an oath, accompanied by '*verfluchter Jude*.'" Not only total indifference, but in many cases cruel hatred and disdain, is displayed towards the Jewish population, whose sufferings are so great and whose condition is so pitiful.

II

CONDITIONS IN LITHUANIA

WHILE practically everything that has been written with regard to the condition of the Jews in Poland applies also to the western portions of Russia and to Lithuania, certain special conditions obtain in the latter province which, if there be degrees in extreme wretchedness, render the lot of the Jews there even more pitiable than is endured by their Polish brethren. This state of affairs has been brought about by the operation of two instruments of oppression that have been applied with that skill, logic, and thoroughness of which the German is a past master, but with an added sense of tragic humour not so usually characteristic of the Prussian ruling classes.

The two methods of oppression referred to, extortion and forced labour, reduce themselves to a single principle of government. To liberate Lithuania was worth the paying for, and who could with reason be expected to pay if not the Lithuanians themselves? To be sure, the people of Lithuania were pitifully poor, but there were plenty of Jews to shoulder the burden, and it is on the shoulders of the Jews that the yoke has been forced to lie. The method employed was almost ingenious in its simplicity. A bewildering mass of laws, rules, and regulations was promulgated by the military authorities for the better government of the country. Had the Jews understood these rules they doubtless would have done their best to observe them, for they are a long-suffering, law-abiding people. But the laws were cunningly published, not in Russian or Yiddish, but in German and Lithuanian, of which the Jews understand hardly a word, and hence the laws were honoured in the breach rather than in the observance.

But the German official was merciful, and he imposed fines and not imprisonment for these unavoidable breaches of impossible laws, and so the stock of shekels of the poor Jew, never

in Lithuania a wealthy man, soon dwindled to vanishing point. He continued, however, to break the laws—it was impossible to do otherwise—and then his property was confiscated and bought up for a mere song by the swarms of German auction-buyers who infested the country.

It is related on trustworthy authority that thousands of families sold their clothes to the last shirt and bedding to the last pillow. When this failed to bring forth the needed money, a law was passed making the whole Jewish community in Lithuania responsible for each individual Jew: the non-Jews were inadvertently omitted from this particular piece of legislation. But little wealth can be extorted even from a community, if it is poverty-stricken in the extreme, and so means were devised for taking possession of the miserable, dilapidated cottages which the law called Jewish house property. Thus more thousands of families have been brought to ruin.

In Vilna, the method of forced loans—made familiar to us in other parts of enemy-occupied territory—was adopted, again with special reference to Jewish needs. A loan of 1,000,000 roubles was raised, of which the Jews, forming forty per cent. of the population, were compelled to contribute no less than 600,000 roubles. People worth less than 10,000 roubles were taxed to the extent of 30,000, and one man was mulcted to the amount of 900 roubles, which he had himself received from a relief fund.

From fines and forced loans it is an easy and natural transition to forced labour, and in its method of application no less ingenuity was employed. In 1916 an invitation was extended to the Lithuanian Jews to come and work for 200 marks a month in a German munition factory. On their refusal to make German shells, every Lithuanian Jew who would not volunteer was imprisoned as a "suspicious person," and soon Lithuania became one vast internment camp. The prisoners, who were sent as far as possible from their homes, were treated with the utmost brutality, and, being "civil" prisoners, they had to feed themselves at their own expense, obviously an impos-

sible proceeding in the circumstances. Under stress of starvation many accepted work, and they were drafted into factories in Germany, having signed on for the duration of the war.

Here they have to work twelve hours a day, and at the end of the day they are marched in gangs to the internment camps. For the slightest breaches of law and discipline severe punishments, corporal punishment as well as fines, are imposed, even for desiring to observe Jewish practices. In one district the Jews were forced to work and eat on the Day of Atonement.

Officially each worker is supposed to receive 200 marks a month—actually he receives nothing but bread and potatoes for board and the prison camp for lodging. For these he is charged 100 marks a month. The remaining 100 marks, supposed to be available for his hungry kinsfolk in Lithuania, is mostly mulcted under the guise of rates and taxes, and, should anything still remain over, it is confiscated as a fine, either on the workman's own account or else as payment for somebody else's fine.

Another form of forced labour has been introduced under the guise of work for the unemployed. The method has frequently taken the form of commanding a town to supply a certain quota of labour. This has placed all the inhabitants at the mercy of the local commander, and the recruiting has been carried out with great cruelty. Both men and women have been impressed in this way for work on the land and for wood-cutting. In many cases the girls required for harvesting have not been forthcoming, and their mothers have consequently been kept in prison. The burden has naturally fallen most severely on the Jews, for they live chiefly in the towns, and the greater proportion of workmen are Jews.

It is doubtful whether the levy always operates in the interest of "legitimate" labour. In a small town near Pinsk all the women and girls over sixteen years of age were one morning ordered to appear in the market place. The majority of these women were Jewesses; their men folk had already joined

the ranks of impressed labour or were serving in the army. The older amongst them were soon sent home, the others were surrounded by soldiers and sent off to some unknown destination. They have not since been heard of.

Frequently girls have been employed as officers' orderlies. In many cases where men have been impressed their wives have committed suicide to save themselves from an unknown fate.

The treatment of Jews generally by the superior German officers in the occupied provinces can hardly be imagined. No control exists, and complaints are out of the question. In many Lithuanian towns civilians are forbidden to remain on the pavement if an officer be present. If a Jew fails in this mark of respect or omits to salute an officer the officer's whip quickly reminds him of the omission.

In one town the military commander ordered all the male Jews suddenly to appear before him on parade one winter morning. They were kept standing in the extreme cold from seven to nine o'clock, and then six were chosen as beaters for his hunt.

* * * * *

A statement made by a leading Jew of a neutral country, who is personally acquainted with conditions in Lithuania, best sums up what those conditions, as they affect the Jews, are:—

"The German liberators have totally ruined the Lithuanian Jews, both morally and economically, in a manner unparalleled by the Russians themselves."



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